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Posner criticizes Soviet jamming of U.S.-funded radio

By Myron Struck
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Soviet commentator Vladimir Posner yesterday told an audience here something he is not likely to broadcast back home — that his country's jamming of U.S.-funded native-language radio programs is "counterproductive."

The jamming could be terminated if the United States toned down the broadcasts' rhetoric, said Mr. Posner, who works for the government-run State Committee for Television and Radio but professes not to be an official Soviet spokesman.

Mr. Posner, who was born in Paris and educated in the United States, complained that U.S. government "broadcasts are subversive, openly."

"It would be a good idea to get some changes there," said Mr. Posner, who speaks English with no hint of a Russian accent.

Mr. Posner has become a U.S. media celebrity with great success in gaining air time on such programs as ABC News' "Viewpoint" with Ted Koppel, "The Phil Donahue Show" and "The Larry King Show."

After President Reagan outlined his defense budget for fiscal 1986 earlier this year, Mr. Posner followed rebuttal comments by House Majority Leader Jim Wright with a seven-minute question-and-answer segment with David Brinkley on ABC News.

That airing drew a private rebuke from Mr. Reagan and a formal letter of complaint from White House Communications Director Patrick J. Buchanan. Eventually, ABC News executives said they had erred in giving Mr. Posner so much air time.

Yesterday, during a 90-minute seminar at the American Enterprise Institute, he deftly fielded pointed questions from critics such as Reed Irvine, head of Accuracy in Media, and Lester Kinsolving, a veteran conservative journalist in Washington.

Pressed for criticism of the Soviet Union, Mr. Posner said simply, "I support my country."

But he said he had been critical of educational policies and pointed out that he joined "with many citizens" in being critical of government "ecology" policies, an area in which he said there was a broad grass-roots movement.

Nevertheless, Mr. Posner said the Soviet government is justified in exiling Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov to the city of Gorki, which is closed to foreigners.

Mr. Posner said that if Mr. Sakharov would refrain from criticizing the Soviet government, he would be allowed to return to Moscow.

"The Soviet government will not allow this man to conduct a campaign against his own government," he said.

Ben Wattenberg, an AEI scholar and a member of the Board of International Broadcasting, which oversees the U.S. international broadcasts, raised the question about Soviet jamming.

He asked whether Mr. Posner would agree to "lessen or eliminate the jamming of all Western broadcasts, including the British Broadcasting Corp., Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe." The Soviets have jammed broadcasts since the late 1940s.

Broadcasts by Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, funded by the

CIA until 1973, are now independently paid for by direct appropriations from Congress. The radio programs offer native-language news reports to Eastern Europe.

Mr. Posner's appearance at the AEI drew criticism from The National Center for Public Policy Research and the Young America's Foundation. But those groups could muster less than a dozen protesters against Mr. Posner's appearance yesterday.

"The endorsement and legitimacy that AEI is granting Posner by hosting this event and by describing Posner in undeservedly positive terms will mislead the public and

those policy analysts who are susceptible to Posner's clever lies and half-truths," said National Center Executive Director Amy Moritz.

Usually interviewed by satellite hookup from Moscow, Mr. Posner is generally not seen on the air within the Soviet Union. He is in the United States to arrange for a televised citizens' exchange June 22 between people in Boston and Leningrad. Mr. Posner and Mr. Donahue hosted a similar event last December.

Mr. Posner said articles about him have been "somewhat insulting."

"Very little effort has been made to try to explain what I'm here to try to do," Mr. Posner said. "I'm here to explain what my country is all about."

Mr. Posner also admitted that some Soviet citizens think Moscow should pull its troops out of Afghanistan, where they are waging war against Afghan resistance forces.

"There are people in my country who think we ought to get out," Mr. Posner said.

But he said "the majority" support the Soviet intervention.

Mr. Irvine, a critic of Mr. Posner as a purveyor of disinformation, challenged the Soviet commentator to respond to misstatements about how his government handled the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in May. Mr. Irvine contended that Mr. Posner had claimed a rapid evacuation took place and that Moscow was initially unaware of the catastrophe — billed by Westerners as the worst nuclear accident in history.

Mr. Posner replied that he had provided accurate information on the evacuation and admitted to making a mistake as to when Moscow learned of the problem.

"I don't justify it," Mr. Posner said. "Hopefully we have learned it was a mistake." He said the problem lies in the Soviet system. "The messenger who brings bad news often has his head cut off," he joked.